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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"**

## Statement submitted by Afri-health Optonet Association, Generation Initiative for Women and Youth Network, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Vision GRAM-International and Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YCSRR), non-governmental organizations in consultative with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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## Statement

The Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YCSRR) applaud the Commission's focus on the social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in its upcoming session. YCSRR acknowledges that social protection is a human right as stipulated under Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

With the priority theme of the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we urge the Commission to recognize that denying young women and adolescent girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights is a form of discrimination and human rights violation under social protection systems. Accordingly, we urge the Commission to prioritize the pressing and emerging issues that are impeding the full realization of women and girls' potential, especially rural young women's and adolescent girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights around the world and are at the brink of being silenced in the international community. One such issue is that of our right to access Comprehensive Abortion Care.

Taking an intersectional and human rights-based approach to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity. We call for the Commission's renewed commitment and solidarity with women, girls and other marginalized groups who face perpetuating systems of inequality, oppression and violence. The challenges to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity differ according to a variety of characteristics, of which the rural/urban divide and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual (LGBTQIA+) can be particularly stark. There is a human rights imperative to address this inequality.

We note that within vulnerable populations, discrimination based on other characteristics also affects the achievement of human rights, limiting opportunity for marginalised groups and suppressing gender equality. These include discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, race, indigeneity, socioeconomics and physical ability. These intersecting factors must also be taken into account.

This statement focuses on social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure in the context of sexual and reproductive health and rights of all, especially young people, in particular girls, young women and LGBTQIA+ youth (referred to in this statement by the term 'women and girls in all their diversity').

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are key to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity as recognised in United Nations documents like the Sustainable Development Goals and Beijing Platform for Action.

YCSRR believes that the following require priority measures for action to enable women and girls in all their diversity to achieve gender equality and empowerment on the social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure:

Ensuring the right to access safe and affordable abortion services as an essential component of social protection system and a comprehensive and integrated package of public health services.

A recent WHO report on unsafe abortion shows that legal restrictions on abortions do not reduce the number of abortions, but rather increase the risks of maternal mortality and morbidity due to unsafe abortions carried out by unskilled attendants, this is particularly concerning in rural areas where most of the time, they

don't have access to quality healthcare services. The consequences of such abortions are often appalling for adolescent girls and young women given the legal, social and cultural barriers and the abortion-related stigma that limits their access to quality sexual and reproductive health services.

According to the 2011 WHO report, about 2.5 million adolescents have unsafe abortions each year, often with complications more serious than those experienced by older women. About 13 per cent of all maternal deaths annually are due to unsafe abortions, 14 per cent of all unsafe abortions in low-and middle-income countries are among girls aged 15-19. Due to the legal restrictions on abortion coupled with the stigma and shame associated with it, many such cases go undocumented -leaving women with lifelong risks and complications. However, in WHO's 2012 'Safe Abortion: technical and policy guidance for health systems', when young women and adolescent girls' right to sexual and reproductive health is fulfilled, including access to a range of modern contraceptives, abortion prevalence rates are lower.

We urge governments and stakeholders to protect women's sexual and reproductive rights, by including safe abortion as an essential intervention to realize the right to health, life and social protection. Such rights are fundamental to achieve Sustainable Development Goal three.

**Unpaid Care and Domestic Work**

Governments often do not recognize the value of unpaid care and domestic work. This should be recognized through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

Governments should develop policies and programmes which reduce the unpaid work burden by providing improved access to infrastructure facilities including time and labour-saving technologies.

**Women, girls and LGBTQIA+ in Poverty**

There has been a link with higher percentage of poverty for marginalized groups. YCSRR is committed to eliminating inequalities, including eradicating poverty by 2030. We believe that all people must enjoy a basic standard of living, including through social protection systems.

We should devote resources to developing rural areas and sustainable agriculture and fisheries, supporting smallholder farmers, especially women farmers, herders and fishers in least developed countries. Governments should implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and marginalized.

Moreover, governments should develop policies/ programmes which provide underprivileged groups with financial, employment, and land security, as well as a voice in decision-making forums, encouraging more female leadership in organisations pertaining to food and agriculture through mentoring opportunities and training.

**Life Cycle Approach in Social Protection**

Governments should adopt a life cycle approach in social protection. Address vulnerabilities and marginalized position associated with life stages such as motherhood, infancy, school age, disability, sickness. They are universalistic rather than limited to the poor which will reduce exclusion. Moreover, the rights based rather than discretionary so that governments could be held accountable. They are

customised and at the same time, showing to be fiscally sustainable even in low-income countries over the longer run.

**Education**

We urge governments to allocate specific budgets and more funds from GDP to social protection programs and not on its central provident fund. They should work with local partners to improve facilities to provide women and girls living in rural areas education that is accessible, of the highest standards and include gender appropriate and sensitive sanitation facilities and safe environments.

**HIV and AIDS**

Women and girls in all their diversity face heightened discrimination, victimisation and social isolation. They have fewer supportive resources because of limited mobility, access to education and social support and financial resources. They have reduced access to providers who are comfortable with, or have accurate non-judgemental knowledge about, the treatment and services they need. This can expose them to harmful discrimination and potential abuse, putting their health at risk. Governments should develop policies that will involve and mention LGBTQIA+ people in the social protection policies.

**Conclusion**

The exclusion of women and girls in all their diversity in social protection systems exists. Feminisation of inequality persists, and the eradication of these inequalities in all its forms and dimensions, is an indispensable requirement for women's social security, economic empowerment and sustainable development. We stress the mutually reinforcing links between the achievement of gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and the presence of a rights-based social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure. We realise that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the global goals and targets. We also stress the need to ensure an adequate standard of living for women, girls and LGBTQIA+ throughout the life cycle, including through social protection systems.

We stress the importance of taking targeted measures to eradicate inequalities in all its forms and dimensions, and of implementing nationally appropriate systems and measures for all, including social protection floors, based on national priorities, paying particular attention to women, children, LGBTQIA+, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities, especially if they are living in a rural area.

All those policies and programmes involving social protection need a clear gendered budget to realise those goals with transparent and ethical monitoring.